



Five Traits of True Leadership

Brett & Kate McKay

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We all lead at some point in our life. We serve as leaders in our jobs, in our communities, and in our families. For many, being a leader means having the power to control others. Those who take this view eventually find that the more they try to control people, the less influence they have over them. For others, leadership means being in a position of authority. Yet, a man can be a leader even if he's on the bottom of the totem pole. When a man sees that something must be done, he won't let his lack of position limit him from taking charge; he steps into the gap and assumes responsibility. True leadership is not about superiority, position, or prestige. It's about revealing and releasing the potential of those around you. Leadership is not about the power of one, but facilitating the greatness of many.

Unfortunately, many men today are sloughing off leadership responsibilities either because of laziness or apathy. They would rather live a life of ignoble ease and have others shoulder the responsibility for them. But the world needs the leadership of virtuous men more than ever. When you're called to serve as a leader, will you be ready to take on the challenge?

In 1950, the United States Military printed a small book for all armed forces officers¹ on how to become better leaders and men. In it, five traits are set forth on what makes an effective leader. We've taken these traits and explored their meaning and application for every man whether an officer or a civilian.

1.<http://www.gutenberg.org/dirs/2/5/4/8/25482/25482-h/25482-h.htm>

1. Quiet resolution

An effective leader has the resolve to see every task through to the end. Resolve is easy to have in the quiet before the storm comes. Resolve is a breeze when one's commitment has never been tested. It is when the fear, chaos, and stress of a crisis hits that true resolve is revealed. In any situation, there will be an opportunity for retreat, an escape hatch, the chance to shirk responsibility and choose safety and defeat over risk and greater reward. At that moment, the man with quiet resolve does not waffle, he does not doubt the choice that he knows is right. Without the terrible grip of indecision seizing him, he is cool and levelheaded, unflappable in the face of challenge. He is not loud, yelling and frenetically scurrying about in an attempt to cover his lack of grit with useless action. The man with quiet resolution is a man others can feel supremely confident in. While the world around him goes to pot, he knows what his mission is and he calmly fulfills it. He is the anchor in the storm.

How to become a leader with quiet resolution

Do not wait for a crisis to emerge to make a decision. Inventory your values and goals, and set a plan for how you will react when certain crises arise and important decisions need to be made. DO NOT wait to make your choice until the heat of the moment, when you will be most tempted to surrender your values. Set a course for yourself, and when trials come, and you are sorely tested, you will not panic, you will not waver, you will simply remember your plan and follow it through.

2. The hardihood to take risks

Nothing ventured, nothing gained. Great achievements come to those who are willing to take risks. A leader who continually plays it safe will never put themselves or the people they lead in a position to experience success. A life without risks is surely alluring; its sweet lullaby of safety and comfort has lulled many a man into the trap of mediocrity and apathy. The weak man stands at the crossroads of decision, tempted by the possible reward and yet paralyzed by the fear of defeat. He is blinded to the fact that even failure brings its own rewards. Without failure a man never comes to know himself, his limits, his potential, and what he is truly capable of. A man who never dares greatly fails to see that he has taken the greatest risk of all: the risk that he will never progress, never refine his soul, never amount to anything worthwhile.

How to become a leader that takes risks

The fear of taking risks can be very real. You cannot expect to have the courage to take a large risk when you have had no experience taking small ones. So find opportunities in your daily life to take little risks. It could be as small as approaching a stranger and striking up a conversation. Find an activity that frightens you, like public speaking and go for it. As you venture more risks, you develop the capacity to overcome your fear and gain the wisdom to know when a risk is worth taking. You will achieve the mettle to take the big risk when your leadership abilities are truly called upon.

3. The readiness to share in rewards with subordinates

A great leader, although supremely confident, humbly acknowledges that no success, no matter how large of a role he personally played in bringing it to fruition, is a wholly solo effort. He is deeply grateful for all those, even those with small roles, who played a part in the achievement. And he understands human nature. He understands that people love to be recognized for their contributions. When a group or organization succeeds, a true leader makes it a priority to recognize both in public and private the contributions of those he led. When a person sees that a leader is humble and will share in success, they'll be more willing to follow that person.

How to become a leader that shares rewards with subordinates

Sharing success with the people who follow you can be as easy as offering public recognition or increasing their compensation. A simple thank you card expressing your gratitude for an employee's effort in completing a project can go a long ways in building loyalty to you and your organization. When offering thanks or giving praise, try to be as specific as possible. It shows the person you lead that you are keenly aware of what they do and makes the thanks or praise more personal and sincere.

4. An equal readiness to take the blame when things go adversely

It is when things go wrong that true leaders are separated from the pretenders. The weasel leader will gladly accept the accolades when he and his team succeeds, but will find another individual to take the fall when things get tough. When followers see this, it completely demolishes any confidence and allegiance to that leader. True leaders will take responsibility for *all* consequences of their decisions, even the bad ones. Even when the results were the fault of a subordinate, a true leader will still take all the blame. Perhaps the leader failed to communicate clearly what the subordinate's duty was, or maybe the leader failed to match the right man with the right job. After taking responsibility for the results, an effective leader will immediately take action to correct the situation.

How to be a leader by taking the blame when things go adversely

When taking the blame, you must do so sincerely. Your confession must spring from a genuine belief that you were at fault. To accept blame, but to do so grudgingly, makes you a boy, not a man. Never play the part of the martyr and seek glory for taking the fall. Likewise, don't take the blame publically, but then tell your subordinates that the only reason you took responsibility was to save their asses. You'll look like a phony and deteriorate their trust in you.

5. The nerve to survive storm and disappointment and to face each new day with the score sheet wiped clean; neither dwelling on one's successes, nor accepting discouragement from one's failures

All of history's great leaders had moments of supreme success and moments of devastating defeat. Great leaders focus on the things they can change and influence, and the past is not one of those things. If you fail, learn from it and then immediately cease to dwell on it. Rehashing the past will not do anything for you. Moreover, the people a man leads will lose confidence in their leader if they continually brood over their failures.

When you succeed, celebrate with your followers, and move on. A leader who continually dwells on past success shows that he has not set his eye on greater things. Additionally, as we learn from the Greeks, a leader's hubris can quickly become their downfall. Always stay humble and hungry.

How to become a leader by not living in the past

Read biographies of great leaders from history. By reading about the lives of these great men, you'll learn that even the best leaders faced enormous setbacks. You'll gain perspective and come to see that one failure does not mean the death of a man's capacity to lead. And the amazing feats of the great men of history will inspire you to believe in the powerful influence on history a true leader can wield.



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